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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the rationale and purpose of a library assignment (suitable for 100- and 200-level communication courses) designed to expose students to concepts about communication research. The assignment encourages students to explore the library, enhances their understanding of the research process and scholarly journals, helps them discover methods of locating articles cited in textbooks, and develops rudimentary skills needed to read and critique scholarly journal articles. The first part of the assignment, given in the first week of class, provides students an introduction to the library and the services it offers. During the first 4 weeks of class, students are asked to mark statements from the text that amaze, interest, or annoy them. For the second part of the assignment, the students go to the library to find the source of one of the statements. Students share briefly with the class the topics of their articles. In the third part of the assignment, students write a report presenting a summary and critique of an article from a scholarly journal. In exchange for a minimum of class time, students gain confidence, knowledge, and skills. Some students catch the excitement and cultivate the inquisitiveness which undergirds true education. (Appendixes that present student handouts describing the three parts of the assignment, and a list of short readings about research are attached.) (RS)

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ED 363 896

"HOW DO THEY KNOW THAT?"

TEACHING STUDENTS TO TRACE, READ AND CRITIQUE

RESEARCH CITED IN TEXTS

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INTEGRATING RESEARCH SKILLS IN THE COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM

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"HOW DO THEY KNOW THAT?" TEACHING STUDENTS TO TRACE, READ AND CRITIQUE RESEARCH CITED IN TEXTS

You are lecturing from your notes and you make a statement such as, "Women are interrupted by men more than men are interrupted by women." Or "Men talk more in mixed-sex dyads than women." Or "Women smile more than men." From the back of the room comes the voice, "How do they know that?" "Says who?" or "Where'd you get that from?"

When students challenge statements that seem out of line with their own experiences, their questions provide an excellent springboard for inquiry and introduction to research concepts and methods. Their internal conflict and curiosity about what they know intuitively or experientially to be true and what a text or lecturer says is true, according to that which we often (ambiguously to them) refer to as "the literature," affords the opportunity for an assignment that meets students at their point of interest.

This paper describes the rationale for an assignment about research that can be used in any 100- or 200-level communication course, the purpose of such an assignment, and variations on that assignment.

MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE

The motivation and rationale for exposing students in first- and second-year courses to concepts about communication research come from several sources. The first is student questions about the research process and conclusions cited in a text or lecture.

Communication courses seem inherently interesting to our students and most assume some knowledge of the subject through life experiences. Perhaps that leads students to question communication concepts more than chemistry or algebra concepts. During the semester I began teaching "Communication Between the Sexes" I could no longer ignore the persistent question "How do they know that?" It is an excellent question and to students' credit shows an inquisitiveness and questioning that may excite them about the research process. A discussion of ways of knowing may help dispel defensiveness on the part of students who "know" differently than what research tells us.[1] It's easy and perhaps tempting to brush aside the questions with the remark, "Research shows that. . . " or "The literature indicates. . . ." These remarks may make no sense to the inquirer at all. When there is so much content to cover, it may seem like there is no time to cover these questions. This assignment is an attempt to begin to answer some of the student-generated questions in a short amount

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[1]Frey, L.R., Botan, C.H., Friedman, P.G., and Kreps, G.L. (1991). Everyday Ways of Knowing in Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, pp. 2-5.

of class time.

Each of us has a "response-ability" (an ability to respond) to those asking the questions. Whether the course is interpersonal, organizational, intercultural, or small group communication, it is difficult to get all of the content covered, and after all the purpose of the course is not to teach research. Yet we all want students to understand certain research concepts by the time they get to 300- level courses. Introducing research concepts allows us to meet our "response-ability" and to facilitate students' answering their own questions: Where does the information in the text come from? Do I believe what is in the text? Why or why not? What would make the text more credible for me?

A second motivation for an assignment about research in 100- and 200-level courses was a discovery that many students in 300-level courses had NEVER been required to find and/or read a scholarly journal; and that in fact, many had no idea what a scholarly journal was or how it differed from Ladies Home Journal. Students have been known to get to their senior year without being required to set foot in the college library let along learn how to find and read research articles. The problem was succinctly stated by Byers: "Thus, the largest obstacle in teaching these [research methods] courses has been the students' lack of exposure to scholarly publications in previous courses. Thus, they are not necessarily familiar with what research is

prior to this course."[2]

In addition to addressing direct student questions and concerns about students' understanding of research, a final reinforcing factor for this assignment was the discussion at last year's SCA pre-convention program on graduate education. Some of the deliberation indicated a concern for the lack of exposure to and familiarity with concepts of research at the undergraduate level and a desire to improve the preparation of undergraduates.

PURPOSE OF ASSIGNMENT

This assignment is to encourage students to explore the library, to enhance their understanding of the research process and scholarly journals, to discover methods of locating articles cited in their texts, and to develop rudimentary skills needed to read and critique scholarly journal articles. This assignment does not have as its goal getting the students to write a research paper, nor is its goal to have them do research.

THE ASSIGNMENT

This library exercise has three parts and I attach the first part to the syllabus and assign it the first week with a due date the second week. That ensures that students physically set foot in

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[2]Byers, Peggy Yuhas. (1992). Approaches to Teaching the Undergraduate Introductory and Advanced Research Methods Courses. Short course presented at SCA, Chicago, IL., 1992.

the library. Part I, "Introduction to the Library" (Appendix A), requires students to become familiar with some of the library resources, equipment, and research capacities. It also introduces them to the differences between popular magazines, which they may have used for research in high school, and scholarly journal articles, which report communication research. For some, this is the first time they have looked at journals and they are asked to compare and contrast them. In class, they compile lists of differences and typical lists look like this:

POPULAR MAGAZINES	SCHOLARLY JOURNALS
written for general population	written for professionals and
shorter, eye-catching, photos	longer, dull, statistics
easy-reading style	formal, technical language
more opinions, personal stories, emotional, first person, connects to you	facts, statistics, cite references, unemotional, research, scientific, experiments, detached, unbiased
entertaining	scholarly
sources of information are vague	numerous citations of sources bibliographies
authors are not necessarily experts in the content of article	authors are scholars or experts in the content

We discuss their initial library experiences and trouble-shoot any difficulties. Students who may never have used a computer for research (especially some nontraditional, returning students) are encouraged/forced/allowed/guided to shed their computerphobia. While I encourage students to take library tours

on their own, I have found that this assignment is preferable to using class time for a library tour. Many library tours result in 30 students standing around while one sits and learns to use the equipment. This assignment requires each student to have a hands-on experience. For some this is a new experience; for others it is doing something they have done numerous times before, with only the content changing.

During the first four weeks of class, students are asked to mark statements from the texts that amaze, interest, or annoy them. The statements they mark include a citation. (A few need clarification about what the name and date after a statement mean, so they are shown how to check the references.) Their markings then become the basis for the second part of this assignment (Appendix B), to go and find one of those sources and see how the research was done. The source must be an actual research article, not a book or review of the literature.

In order to promote student interest in and discussion of the citations, it is helpful to conduct a mini-survey in class. For example, if the text states that women prefer men of average height, but given a choice of tall or short men, they prefer tall men, a quick written survey of the women in class can be conducted at the end of one class. Copies can be made and distributed to small groups of students at the next class. They can then compile the results and compare the class results with

the statement in the text. This provides a basis for discussion of methods of gaining information, the validity of generalizing from class conclusions, variables that might have affected class results, and ways to improve on this quick, in-class project. As they share ideas, students become more curious about how the research cited in the book was done and begin to understand in a very elementary way the basis on which they might critique others' work. We discuss the parts of a research article, and at this point students are assigned the second part (Appendix B) of the library assignment, to find one of the journal articles cited in the text. There are some short readings (Appendix D) which give overviews of the research process that may be helpful for students to read at this point.

After finding their articles, students share briefly with the class the topics of their articles. The third part of the assignment (Appendix C) is made and students choose whether to read the article they found or that of one of their classmates. Although papers are written individually, groups of students are encouraged to read and discuss the same article in order to promote more creative thinking and divergent views. The reports students write require them to summarize the hypothesis or research questions, the method, the results and the conclusions. They try to identify strengths and weaknesses of the research by looking at any cultural or gender biases, the types of samples used, the methods used and conclusions drawn. They develop their

own ideas and explore the implications and applications of this research by responding to questions which ask what else the findings might imply and what might be suggested or hinted at by this research. They are asked to identify any practical ways that particular groups of people could apply this research in professional or personal behaviors. This assignment invites discussion of how we can use what has been learned and how we could better learn more about this topic. Students often express a fresh and insightful view.

In short, this library assignment stimulates students to find out how the text came to be, how to find the articles cited in the text, and how to read research articles. Upon completion of this assignment, students have commented that they used to think texts were gospel, but now see them as reports on the current state of knowledge in the field. Some express awe at how much knowledge of others' research it takes to author a text. Still others get excited about their new-found ability to check on citations in texts and they become more active learners, reading more articles and checking out how a statement in the text came to be. Some indicate increased use of the library for projects in other classes and just looking around. The real value of this assignment is that in exchange for a minimum of class time students gain confidence, knowledge and skills. Some catch the excitement and cultivate the inquisitiveness which undergirds true education.

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READING REPORT PART 1. **APPENDIX A**

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIBRARY

Go to the T-VI Library, either Main or Montoya Campus. If you are new to the library, pick up a self-guided tour sheet. Follow that to introduce yourself to the library.

1. To find magazine articles, go to **Infotrac**. Type in (as a subject) a topic related to * communication or an author you know has written on the subject. Use the table of contents or the index of the text for ideas. Print a list of ten magazine articles that interest you. Be sure they are under at least two different subheadings. For this item (#1) you do not need to write anything, just print out on one page the ten titles and references. Students in the '70's had to write this all out!

2. Now, choose one of the magazine articles that especially interests you. By using the cassettes next to Infotrac, print the complete article. Be sure the article is about some aspect of * communication. Write a summary of this article.

3. Now go to the computer called the **Intelligent Catalog** or Bibliofile. Browse subjects related to * communication. The easiest way might be to type in topics or authors. Print a list (at least five) of books about * communication (any of the sub-topics from question # 1 above) from Bibliofile.

4. Go to the stacks and find the current issue of one of these or similar **scholarly journals**: Communication Education, Communication Reports, Communication Quarterly. Look over several issues of these journals. Then type the answer to this question in three or four paragraphs:

What are some key differences between magazine articles like the one you printed out in #2 (first found listed in Infotrac) and these scholarly journal articles? You are not comparing the actual content of the articles, but the format, style of writing, and type of information.

5. Now find an article in one of the journals that has these four sections: hypothesis or research questions, method, results and conclusion. Type the citation for this journal article, using the APA style manual. Summarize the conclusions of this article.

6. Go to the **ERIC** computer workstation. Print a list of three publications about * communication.

7. Go to the **ProQuest** computer system. Notice that both popular magazines and scholarly journals are indexed and contained in ProQuest. Find a recent article about * communication. Print the abstract of that article.

*** can be replaced with specific course content: interpersonal, organizational, family, gender, nonverbal, etc.**

READING REPORT PART 2. **APPENDIX B**

TRACKING YOUR JOURNAL ARTICLE
ZIMMERMAN LIBRARY

GOALS: To use the Abstracts and to track down and return with one of the journal articles cited in your text.

Find three statements (which list citations) in the text that you find particularly fascinating, amazing, or unbelievable. Check that the full citations indicate that they came from scholarly journals, not books or popular magazines. You need to find only one article, but starting with three will give you two others to search for should your first choice be unavailable due to books at the bindery or the library not carrying a particular journal.

Write your three references here:

1) _____

_____

2) _____

_____

3) _____

_____

____ Show these to me for a quick check before you proceed.

If you haven't already done so, a tour of the library will give you a helpful orientation. Tours are offered several times during the first three weeks of classes. Call for times.

Time
completed: ASK, ASK, ASK FOR HELP ALONG THE WAY!

_____ 1. Go to Zimmerman and enter the reference area.

_____ 2. Find Communication Abstracts, Call # P 88.8 C 6. ("Speech Communication and Communication Abstracts" is clearly marked on the ends of the shelves.)

_____ 3. Find the Communication Abstracts volume that will contain your article. Write that volume here:

(You may need to use Psychology Abstracts or Sociology Abstracts, depending on your article.)

_____ 4. By subject or author, look up the abstract for your article. (See the two-step directions for using abstracts on the second page of a library handout.) Write the abstract number (not page number) here _____

_____ 5. Make a copy of the abstract.
_____ a copy of the abstract is attached

_____ 6. Find one other abstract by the same author or on the same subject. This may be a book or article.
This abstract is ___ by the same author
OR ___ on the same subject

_____ Communication Abstracts OR ____ other title _____

Volume # _____ Abstract # _____

Citation: _____

_____

_____ 7. Go to Serials Title List (now on a large bound, computer printout) Find the call number of the journal your article is in.

_____

If you didn't need to become familiar with the Abstracts for this assignment and you want to go right to the journal without reading the abstract, use **LIBROS** to find the call number first.

_____ 8. Go downstairs to the journals and find the article. Copy the article and attach it to this form.

____ article attached

You may use this for the Journal Report, or you may use an article found by someone else that you find more interesting.

READING REPORT PART 3. **APPENDIX C**

COMMUNICATION 290 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SEXES
JOURNAL REPORT

The purposes of this assignment are a) for you to see where some of the research that goes into the writing of the text comes from, and b) to have you think critically about what you read and explore the implications and applications of that research. I also hope you will have fun learning and exploring.

Complete the assignments: "Introduction to the Library" and "Tracking Your Journal Article." Once you have read the journal article, you are ready to begin the report.

The report should have the following sections:

Introduction. Get your reader's attention, set the scene for your paper, tell why you are interested in this topic, discuss how your topic fits into the broader field of gender communication, and the significance of the topic.

Article Summary. In your own words, summarize the hypothesis, methodology, results and conclusion of the article. This section is 60% of the grade.

Article Critique. Discuss any particular strengths or weaknesses of the author and research. This might include a bias you believe existed in the author (gender, cultural, philosophical), or particular qualifications for this study, problems or strengths of the research (characteristics of the sample, appropriateness of the method used, rationalizations, generalizations. What questions should be asked?

Implications. What else might these findings imply? Do you see any implications that weren't mentioned? What else do these findings naturally or necessarily hint at or suggest?

Applications. In what practical ways could this research be applied and by whom? As a result, what actual changes in behaviors, beliefs, rules, habits would you suggest? Should teachers, police, lawyers, parents apply this? How?

Conclusion. Conclusions summarize and pull together, often by tying back into the big picture, or referring back to the introduction. Make a strong, concise ending.

STAPLE THIS TO THE BACK OF YOUR REPORT
NAME
290 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SEXES
READING REPORT CRITIQUE SHEET

APPENDIX D

SHORT READING ASSIGNMENTS ABOUT RESEARCH

The following are some short readings that on their own or in conjunction with the library assignments give students an overview of the research concepts and more background information.

In his chapter on "Methods of Nonverbal Communication Research," Michael L. Hecht discusses research questions, methods/approaches (grounded and hypothesis-testing), focus (on individual or interaction), methods (experiments, observations), recording, (surveys, coding systems, fields notes). In ten pages, he gives the student an overview of research in this field.[3]

Lawrence B. Rosenfeld gives an overview of the research process in his introduction to Analyzing Human Communication, 2nd edition. It includes sections on determining the problem, reviewing the literature, designing the research, conducting and reporting the research, and conducting empirical research. That final section includes discussions of the syllogism of science, the research problem, gathering data, measuring instruments, research design, and the laboratory versus the field.[4] The workbook is full of well-designed research projects students can do to understand the process. Even without conducting any of the research, students get a thorough overview of the research process from reading the first chapter.

In a two-page section of their research book, Rubin, Rubin, and Piele provide an excellent overview of scholarly journals. Chapter Six provides annotated lists of the most-used communication journals.[5]

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[3]Hecht, Michael L. (1990) Methods of Nonverbal Communication Research. In Joseph A. DeVito and Michael L. Hecht. The Nonverbal Communication Reader. Prospect Heights, Il.: Waveland Press, Inc. pp. 414-424.

[4]Rosenfeld, Lawrence B. (1980). Analyzing Human Communication. (2nd edition). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt. pp. 1-14.

[5]Rubin, R.B., Rubin, A.M., & Piele, L.J. (1990). Communication Research: Strategies and sources (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.